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Department of State

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Rec'd: January 27, 1956 8:36 a.m.

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FROM: Tripoli

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 374, January 27, 10, a.m.

PRIORITY

SENT DEPARTMENT 374, REPEATED INFORMATION PRIORITY LONDON 66, BENGHAZI UNNUMBERED.

On top series recent alarming developments including Prime Minister Ben Halim's consideration that our offer development assistance inadequate (EMBTEL 368) and indication that future aid must be forthcoming with "no (repeat no) strings" (EMBTEL 370) situation has risen January 26, which would make it appear joint US-UK gift armored car squadron also running into difficulties.

Shortly after noon Prime Minister asked see me at once and on my arrival his office few minutes later blandly said he had just been made aware of fact that American contribution to armored car squadron had not (repeat not) yet arrived and so will not (repeat not) be included in elaborate ceremonies scheduled for handing over British contribution February 1 (EMBTEL 343). Prime Minister then took position ceremony without American equipment could result in public criticism his "pro-American position" and suggested ceremony be postponed. In order fully canvass implications this new move I asked that Foreign Office Under Secretary Jerbi join with me and British Ambassador in discussion this matter later in day.

Subsequently Embassy informed by British Embassy that earlier in morning officers responsible for ceremony had been told by Defense Minister that invitations were not (repeat not) being printed, guest list must be severely cut and no (repeat no) publicity could be given ceremony.

Since Prime Minister has long been aware American equipment would not (repeat not) arrive in time and since he cleared nature and extent ceremonies with British weeks ago can only conclude that he desires there be no (repeat no) public recognition at this time of joint US-UK arms gift and that his decision based on considerations completely at variance with those expressed to me. Possible explanations include desire:

(1) Bargain for

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(1) Bargain for additional arms assistance;

(2) Tacitly turn down present US-UK offer as inadequate;

(3) Have time receive and consider new Egyptian and/or Soviet offer;

(4) Cover decision accept arms from non-western sources already taken.

Possible also Soviet Ambassador has hinted display US-UK force or US-UK Libyan relationship at this time not (repeat not) conducive satisfactory atmosphere Soviet-Libyan economic talks.

Ambassador Graham and I agree that in one of above probably lies explanation Ben Halim's sudden action and will point out:

(1) It would be difficult and extremely embarrassing to cancel ceremony at such short order;

(2) Cancellation ceremony could seriously jeopardize consideration now being given in London and Washington entire Libyan Army equipment question;

(3) Ceremony should accordingly be held as scheduled with Prime Minister and British and American Ambassadors attending, latter accompanied by their respective staffs, and making appropriate remarks on the occasion. Furthermore full publicity should be given ceremony in local press.

Incidentally when may we expect arrival American equipment?

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